

Interim Report on Product Development Activities

for the

ReproSalud Microenterprise and Product Development Project

Project No. 527 0355

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USAID/Peru

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by

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I. Update

A. Overview

Docey Lewis, Product Development Consultant for Weidemann Associates, went to Miami, Florida, from September 5-7, 1999, to meet with Rochelle Beck, another Product Development Consultant for Weidemann Associates, to produce the Interim Report (below) on the progress of the ReproSalud Technical Assistance/Micro-Enterprise Support project. Ms. Lewis then went to Lima, Peru, from September 8-10, 1999, where she met with Josefa Nolte and Sr. Duvall, ReproSalud's business plan consultant, to present the Interim Report and recommendations. The recommendations were discussed and will be incorporated into Sr. Duvall's business plan along with his recommendations.

B. Project Development and Production

Ms. Lewis followed up on the New York International Gift Fair (NYIGF) orders for samples. Samples for six companies—George, World Paper, Little Souls, Christopher Hyland, Inc., Wild Ginger, and SERRV—were detailed for Josefa Nolte and Raquel Oliart. Ms. Lewis left instructions for samples of yarns for Sheila Meyer, Product Designer for Weidemann Associates, to support Sheila Meyer's efforts with Samii (a company) and other clients. She also left artwork with Josefa for Little Souls.

Ms. Lewis and Ms. Nolte met with Sr. Duvall in two meetings. At the first meeting, they gave him a presentation on the Market Demand Process to ensure that Sr. Duvall understood the strategy of the ReproSalud Product Development team. At the second meeting, Sr. Duvall interviewed Ms. Lewis to answer specific marketing, product development, and production questions.

C. Problems Encountered

Ms. Nolte seems pressured by institutional issues. This is an on-going problem. Until a business entity is set up that can manage with day-to-day business issues, without the involvement of key ReproSalud personnel, time which should be spent dealing with day-to-day business responsibilities, is spent elsewhere. This is taking its toll on Ms. Nolte. She is under a lot of stress, and needs assistance with managing the details of production and delivery.

(Note: Sr. Duvall did not appear as a creative and experienced business consultant. He did not always ask the right questions, and seemed more interested in pleasing the institution that contracted him rather than giving insightful assessments and advice.)

There is growing support for Product Development (Income Generation) part of the project, particularly with Susana Moscoso, but not all ReproSalud "chiefs" agree (yet).

A Stop Work Order was issued by Weidemann Associates to Docey Lewis, Sheila Meyer, and Bob Landmann until a reallocation of days process is completed with USAID.

D. Next Steps and Status of Orders

A two-day Product Development Retreat is planned for mid-November in Lima with Duvall, Nolte, Lewis, Moscoso, Galdos, and Beck attending. The purpose will be to review Duvall's business plan and to formulate ReproSalud's strategy accordingly.

Production of re-orders of SERRV teddy bears and GEORGE mice is underway. All other sampling is taking place as a follow-up activity to the NYIGF.

As soon as the Stop Work Order is lifted, Sheila Meyer will begin design work for the two clients.

Interim Report on Product Development Activities

Docey Lewis and Rochelle Beck, Product Designers, Weidemann Associates
September 6, 1999

I. Overview

The ReproSalud economic development component has several objectives, namely to:

- Increase the income of the women participating because it is recognized that better economic stability and increased income contribute to reproductive health;
- Increase the women's disposable income for their health care and that of their families;
- Improve the quality of their lives and that of their families;
- Give the women a basis to understand the business world and develop specific abilities to make them stronger, improve their self-esteem, and empower and train them to run a microenterprise.

In implementing this component over the past two years, the project's product development team has achieved the following:

- Identified 36 communities with 1,522 members in 8 regions with the potential to develop products using indigenous materials and skills;
- Conducted 80 training sessions to train and motivate the women to work in product development and production;
- Conducted 52 workshops for 626 women to train them in the skills needed to convert materials into products ready for international and national markets;
- Designed 103 products suitable to show customers;
- Identified, employed, and trained 6 field coordinators who are supporting the women's groups in each region; and,
- Designed an intervention strategy and methodology to continue these activities.

After personal site visits by Josefa Nolte, ReproSalud Product Designer, the income generation sites were chosen based on the following criterion:

- Native raw materials that could become the basis for a commercial product;
- Existing skills that could be adapted for a commercial product;
- Strong enthusiasm or willingness to participate in a commercial development project among women's groups; and,
- An existing community organization that could be trained to manage the proposed commercial venture.

In almost all the communities initially selected for the project, none of the women were commercial artisans. While many of them were skilled with their hands, for example, they may have woven cloth for family clothing or knitted sweaters or wool hats for their children and

husbands, they never plied their craft as a commercial venture. Their abilities were survival skills. Many are shepherds and work alongside men in the fields as farmers. They were not running businesses; they did not borrow money, use capital, repay loans, figure out pricing, cost of raw materials or labor, investigate the need for warehousing, or use any other process that is part of a typical business venture.

Therefore, prior to their work with ReproSalud, none of the laws of the marketplace came to bear on these women's lives. There was never a thought to having a disciplined schedule of production; they made crafts for their families' use, between chores in the field. As a result, when the ReproSalud product designers began working with these women to develop specific products, they also taught the women basic business skills as well as skills tailored to the design industry. The project staff saw these topics as being critical to the women's business success. Topics included:

- Commercial Image: Developing a new image as commercial producers;
- Developing Product Samples using local resources and skills;
- Quality Issues: Evaluating and maintaining adequate quality in every product produced;
- Planning & Timeliness: Planning the use of materials and time to finish an order on time;
- Capital Use: Using capital—by woman and by group—to ensure completion of the order and group's development;
- Product Development Cycle: Working with designers, clients, and market agents to prepare samples and complete an entire production cycle;
- Contracts: Respecting contractual terms, for example, exclusivity of designs and the importance of completing orders according to the contract terms;
- Market and World Economy: Developing a new vision of their current and future role in the larger economy, going beyond local boundaries; and,
- Sustainability: Building a community-based institution that could sustain the work begun by ReproSalud.

Many of these topics were discussed with the *promotoras* (local health workers) at the Lima March 1999 Product Development and Production workshop. For most of the women producers, these are complex concepts. Unused to "classroom-style" learning, the women are learning by doing. The experience of producing an order, building work habits, and developing relationships with promotoras and ReproSalud staff contribute to the women's overall understanding of the project, their role, and benefits to be shared.

Over the past two years, ReproSalud staff and community members have achieved many of the project objectives using an integrated participatory effort. Their activities included the following:

- ReproSalud staff participated in and conducted over 52 product development training sessions.
- More than 1,500 community members participated in product development.
- Product designer, Docey Lewis, visited Peru 6 times for training and strategic development work and, with Josefa Nolte, designed over 103 new products.
- Josefa Nolte attended 3 New York International Gift Fairs (NYIGF), where she made first-

hand contact with more than 20 US importer/wholesalers, of which at least one-third show serious promise.

- These group efforts produced sales of 60 different products with an approximate value of \$13,000.00 FOB Lima.

II. Product Development Status

Based on the diagnostic work done in the communities to identify natural resources and skills, preliminary analyses of US market demand, and ongoing work with the communities to respond to market demand, the product development teams developed several categories of successful and potentially winning products:

Piasaba Palm Products

- Broom (small, medium, large and extra large (S, M, L, EL) sizes)
- Christmas broom (with red and green detail)
- Fire-starters
- Bundles (S, M, L)
- Place mat
- Tassels (S, M, L)

For years, piasaba has been harvested and used in the domestic broom industry. The Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture, recognizing its worth, has designated it as a protected species. In cooperation with local community residents, the team used this rustic and strong fiber and taught the women to make the above six products that are both elegant in style and of excellent quality, using an environmentally benign process.

Piasaba broom production became a prime example of how to develop, implement and monitor the quality control concept. Since the project was immediately successful in getting a US order for 1,200 brooms, the next step was to ensure that the women would produce the quality product that was expected. This could not be left to chance. The product designers developed a checklist with pictures and graphics (since many of the women are illiterate) and used other hands-on techniques to illustrate the 32 separate qualities of an acceptable broom. By detailing the quality control process, the women now use the checklist both during production and as a final check before shipping. This model can be tailored to other products and other communities.

We have successfully identified two US importer/wholesalers (SERRV International and Wild Ginger) that will continue to market the piasaba products at least through the year 2000. **Based on these successful products, our US partners are now eager to receive more products samples made from the piasaba palm.**

Knitted and Felted Pet Products

- 2 knitted alpaca pet toys with bells in assorted natural colors: mouse, bear
- 8 knitted cotton pet toys in assorted bright colors stuffed with catnip, with and without "fishing pole" stick: mouse, fish, bear, rabbit, octopus, gecko, frog, dragonfly

- Set of 3 felted balls with bell inserts
- Set of 3 square felt blocks
- Knitted alpaca dog sweaters (6 assorted patterns)
- Braided alpaca dog leash
- Knitted "doggie" Christmas stocking
- Knitted cat Christmas stocking

The alpaca mice are made entirely from the alpaca that the women of the *altiplano* shepherd. The women cut the wool, hand-spin the yarn, and knit these successful US products.

The alpaca products represent an interaction between the Peruvian communities, the product designer, and the client (GEORGE); together, they developed these products for specific catalog mail order and retail sales. **The client has placed its fifth reorder for the alpaca mice and is urging future product development to capitalize on high demand for these products.**

Knitted Animal Line

- 6 alpaca teddy bears (S,M,L, seasonal, various textures)
- Set of pastel colored alpaca and cotton animals (rabbit, duck, lamb)
- Set of alpaca and cotton "jungle" animals (giraffe, elephant, lion, zebra, hippo)
- Knitted alpaca chickens (S, M, L) in assorted colors

Of all the products in this category, the alpaca teddy bear has been the most successful market-driven product that we have developed to date. In the diagnostic stage, both alpaca wool and knitting skills were abundant in several communities. However, the communities were not making a product that would have wide commercial appeal; the women needed further training in hand-knitting to upgrade and standardize product quality. In the US, the teddy bear market is very large. Docey Lewis designed the teddy bear; the local promotora, Elsa Balon, came up with the sweater design that met Docey's sense of market taste, used raw materials locally available, and was within the women's knitting ability.

The project made an initial sale of 500 teddy bears to SERRV International for its Christmas 1999 catalog. SERRV just informed the project that the entire season's projection of teddy bears sold-out in the first three weeks of catalog sales; as a result, we can expect significant reorders before year-end.

In addition, a large U.S. doll manufacturing company, Little Souls, asked for samples of the bear to use in several new models and asked the project to make sweaters, vests, hats, pouches, and similar items in the bear's design in larger sizes as doll clothing. If samples can be made and approved on a timely basis, we project strong sales to this company.

Knitted Scarf, Throw, and Pillow Line

- "Elsa" alpaca throw
- *Chancay* design alpaca throw
- *Chancay* design alpaca pillows
- Assorted knitted scarves (machine knit with embroidery)

- Sheila Meyer pillow and throw line
- Brown cotton knitted and/or crocheted pillow
- Brown cotton knitted and/or crocheted throw

As with the above category, this group builds on indigenous materials and knitting and crocheting skills. Here, however, we are using commercially-spun alpaca yarn, (as handspun yarn is too scratchy for a product touches the skin), and will use handspun naturally brown cotton.

Designer Docey Lewis connected another product designer, Sheila Meyer, the former head of design for Baby Gap, in touch with the project. Ms. Meyer is currently designing a line of home accessories for Samii, a US company that is opening a new home product division. In addition, SERRV has expressed an interest in featuring an alpaca throw.

The alpaca scarf line needs further design work, but will be picked up by Samii and marketed to other potential buyers.

Tassels

- 12 assorted alpaca
- 12 assorted paper
- 6 assorted brown cotton
- 12 assorted acrylic
- 6 assorted piasaba
- Potpourri tassel

Tassel production is an example of adapting a centuries' old Peruvian tradition to fit a very specific US and European market niche. Tassels or pompoms in Peru are used to adorn women's braids, as decoration on weavings, and on llamas and alpacas. With design input, we will update these traditional adornments.

At the NYIGF, the product designers met with the principal US buyer of decorative tassels, Christopher Hyland of Christopher Hyland Inc. His company sells tassels made all over the world to other manufacturers that, in turn, make pillows, draperies, and other home decor products. He has requested samples using the resources the product development team identified in several participating communities.

Ceramic Tiles

- *Shipibo* style mini tiles (set of 6 designs)
- Ceramic wall-hanging (spaced, hung tiles)
- Ceramic eggs (set of 6 designs)

We looked into this category because of the exquisitely beautiful Shipibo pottery-making skills in the project area and the strong US product market for tiles and decorative ceramics.

Because of problems in the communities that are working on tiles, we have not advanced beyond initial samples. If both the organizational and technical problems can be resolved soon, this may be an area that the product design team will return to in the coming year.

Christmas Trim Line

- Knitted Christmas stockings (3 designs, traditional Christmas colors)
- Embroidered Christmas stocking (red wool w/floral cuff)
- Knitted cotton ornament line (set of 6)
- Potato and handmade paper angels (set of 3)
- Christmas botanical topiary
- Christmas botanical wreath
- Christmas botanical garland

This category was also included because of its strong US market; 80 percent of all annual US Christmas sales are completed between October and December. **Christmas-related products spell economic success!**

The project made initial samples of Christmas stockings, potato-face angels, garlands and wreaths. We found an established US importer/wholesaler, Tesoro's, Inc., for the stocking. Another customer, Regency International, was interested in the wreath. Sample modifications have yet to be made.

Dried Botanicals

- Dried dyed leaves
- Potpourri (dyed)
- Big pods
- Non-seasonal wreaths and garlands

This category is a natural convergence of worldwide interest in preserving the rainforests while providing an economic opportunity to the local inhabitants by harvesting and selling the rainforests' riches and using natural, environmentally-benign products in the home. The product development team identified 20 unusual leaves, seeds, and pods in the Ucayali region for harvest, drying, and mixing into potpourri and other products. Recently, the project hired an excellent promotora to coordinate product development activities in this area; we look forward to more successful sample and production levels in the coming year.

- In the US, Pear Sun expressed interest in buying moderate orders of all the products we could develop.
- Wild Ginger wants to carry selected products as well.

Handmade Paper

- 8 to 12 different kinds of papers by the sheet
- 8 to 12 different Christmas cards
- Set of 6 non-seasonal cards w/envelopes
- Gift tags (assorted designs set of 6)
- Stationery set
- Paper flower gift ties
- Paper flower wreaths, topiaries, garlands
- Acid-free paper for local artists

- Lampshades

This product category has grown to be one of the most beloved among many of the women's groups that the project works with. Making handmade paper was not indigenous to Peru, and yet the women who learned the skills are among our most enthusiastic participants. We have differentiated our products from the Lima manufacturer who makes handmade paper from recycled materials, by making our papers and products from plant materials indigenous to the regions where we are working, (e.g., banana, sugarcane waste, grasses, vines, etc.).

In the US market, handmade paper is a very big business. While our production has not yet reached the levels or competitive pricing to supply our principal importer/wholesaler, World Paper, its president has expressed an interest in buying smaller quantities of our products for her marketing efforts. In addition, we are looking at using handmade paper for other decorative accessories such as lampshades, tassels, angel Christmas ornaments, and flowers to sell to a broad range of US companies.

IV. Remaining Obstacles

As the project moves into the next phase, there are obstacles remaining that need to be addressed in business management, training, and business development for the microenterprise development component to be successful and sustainable.

A. Business Management

- **Resolve Administrative Bottlenecks:** The quick decision-making that is critical in business is often stymied within the project at the national and regional levels. **For example, the regional level administers all banking, health education, and product development activities, which often means that product development suffers. And at the national level, ReproSalud's decision-making style can take too long, especially when a quick business decision is urgently needed.**
- **Staffing:** **At the local level, Peruvian national level, and in the US, more staff time needs to be devoted to the project's business component.** In business, quick response can often mean the difference between a sale or not. The market does not forgive. This is in direct conflict with a calendar based on institutional priorities. Nor can it be effectively accomplished in the US by a part-time consultant.
- **The office needs more bilingual personnel (beyond Josefa Nolte) to speed up accurate communication with buyers and importers in the US market.**
- **Improve Response Time:** The project needs to improve its response time for sample development and refining samples per customers' suggestions. In the absence of a quick response, the customer will think that there is a lack of interest, lack of ability, or some other problem that may sour them on continuing a business relationship with

the project. For example, in January 1998, a knitted Christmas stocking original sample was presented to a US wholesaler who expressed great enthusiasm for marketing it throughout the US, but urged several specific changes be made in the sample. The customer still has not received the corrected sample to sell.

B. Training

1. **A tremendous amount of training is needed to enable these women (and the promotoras) to produce samples or production with a consistency, quality and speed that will bring the cost down and guarantee customer satisfaction.** For example, one of the reasons the knitted Christmas stocking sample has not been produced yet is because the project could not develop the correct shape and knitting gauge. As another example, handmade paper production needs to be improved and streamlined so that its export price is cut in half.
2. **Improve Local Problem-solving Skills:** More training is needed at the local level to ensure follow-through. For example, the Product Development Team selected specific rainforest botanicals for a range of products, but never received any samples. When we looked into the reason, we found that El Niño had altered nature's production of the specific seeds and pods we wanted. However, no one had told us about this problem. No one gathered the range of materials that were available to see if we could substitute them for the original products. As a result, months passed and the project remains in limbo. However, US market demand continues and specific contacts remain interested.
3. **Address Different Cultural Expectations:** Ethical business practices need to be more fully communicated and stressed in the communities. For example, producers need to understand concepts such as exclusivity of designs, commitment to ensuring that the project completes its orders for products, honesty in communicating problems early, and managing production deadlines in the context of traditional holidays.

C. Business Development

1. **Institute Business Management Systems:** Business management systems need to be in place to ensure that all the details—from developing samples to completing production—are tracked and completed properly. These systems are still lacking in many communities and in the project as a whole. For example, it is not uncommon for Josefa Nolte in Lima to receive a package of merchandise from the field without any written document detailing its contents, quality control, price, and other items.
2. **Quantity vs. Quality:** Whereas the overall goal of ReproSalud and USAID is to include an ever-increasing number of women and continue to add communities for outreach and educational services, **to be successful, the**

product development component needs to focus on a few communities and make sure all the necessary steps are completed to create a basis for on-going success. Current project staff do not have time to serve both goals. For example, at present we have visited 32 communities. The project has expressed an interest to increase this to 40 in the near future. However, from a product development point of view, we should probably focus on between six and nine communities to do the job right, with the available staff.

3. **Address Local Concerns:** At times, the fragility of or political disputes within local groups can interfere seriously with organized production. Looking ahead, this can be a serious threat to contractual business relationships.
4. **Change in Availability of Raw Materials:** Even though all products are designed specifically based on the availability of indigenous raw materials, sometimes these materials become unavailable for reasons beyond our control. Piasaba is a good example. This needs to be corrected before we can go forward and make commitments to provide larger and larger orders.
5. **Need for Warehousing Storage and Production Space:** At the local and national levels, there is inadequate storage space for raw materials and finished products and inadequate working space for production. While this is uncomfortable now, it will have serious implications as orders increase. At some point, the cost of warehouse space will need to be included in the project, product cost, or budget.
6. **Uncertain Future:** It is standard business practice to give a new business between three to five years before judging its success. Until now, the economic development component has been an add-on to a much larger reproductive health program. Its future has been uncertain. This uncertainty makes it difficult to forge ahead and develop new potential business partners in the US, create new products, go back to communities to revise samples, and put production plans in place.

V. Potential Market Demand

There are markets with strong potential in Peru, the region, and in international niche markets.

1. **Strong National Markets in Peru:** There are several specific markets within Peru. Josefa Nolte could develop products for local sale. These include machine-knitted sweaters for local consumption in Ancash, handmade paper, specialty cards, and acid-free paper for use by local artists. It would be easy to design archaeological site-specific note cards for sale for the tourist market. It would be important to identify the primary sites selling Peruvian crafts to tourists and ensure that a selection of ReproSalud products can be marketed at these sites.

2. Potential Regional Markets: Given differences in labor and material costs between Peru and Chile, it may be that several of our products would find market demand in Chile. The handmade paper category seems to be the one with the most potential. More investigation is needed.
3. Strong International Niche Markets: US market demand for unique niche products (for example, dog sweaters, teddy bears, *chuno*-faced angels) is responsible for this project's initial success. Our strategy of developing products based on that demand now needs to be supported with growing concern for responsiveness to customers' demands for revised samples, timely reorders, and new samples quickly produced.

In addition to servicing our current customers, we need to maintain our presence at the trade shows to find new importers for the future.

Beyond the US, project staff should ask their exporter, CIAP, to make introduce them to significant European fair trade organizations that may become large customers for our products. These include FTO (Holland), Oxfam and Traidcraft (UK), Geppa (Germany), and CTM (Italy).

VI. Next Steps

With the successful first stage completed, now is the moment to look at the next stage: making the product development, marketing, and exporting into a real business. This is not only to ensure continued product sales, but also to ensure the women's business development. To become a sustainable endeavor, the women will have to completely understand and know how to manipulate the real market—within and outside of Peru—to continue to have income, compete successfully with other producers, and multiply their sources of financing, so they can use their profits to continue their activities.

To build this business, it is highly recommended that the project:

1. Formal recognition by MMR/ReproSalud that the economic development component is to be managed as a legitimate business. That is to say, the business will need to obey the legal and economic norms, laws, and regulations in Peru that apply to any Peruvian business that produces, sells, and exports handmade products.
2. Ensure that there is adequate staff time, space, and economic support to establish the commercial structure need to produce, sell, and export the products made by the women in the project.
3. Continue to coordinate the social and health efforts of ReproSalud and the business so that each supports the other.
4. Continue to train the women participating in all aspects of business management.

To achieve these goals, there are several major activities that need to be addressed in the next one to three years. These include the following:

- Establish a separate and clearly defined chain of command and specific parameters within which business decisions can be made without going through the formal MMR/ReproSalud decision-making structure. Specify the decisions or types of decisions that can be made independently by the product development component.
- Define the physical space necessary for the business to produce, export, and warehouse products and establish a budget line item for the space.
- Define the staff number and qualifications needed in Lima and in the field to ensure prompt follow-up to all business requirements. (For example: The business will need to meet a two-week turn-around time for samples or revised samples, a 48-hour turn-around time for responses to phone calls, faxes, and e-mail messages, and be able to guarantee production in 6 to 8 weeks for initial orders and reorders. These activities will be needed in 6 to 12 communities that will be working with 6 to 12 importers simultaneously.)
- Clearly define what percentage of the time/salaries/expenses of product development staff may be used for other goals of MMR/ReproSalud.
- Do everything that is legally necessary to run the product development unit as a business. This may include designing forms, printing invoices, incorporating, if necessary, coordinating with the SUNAT for accounting and tax purposes, and establishing clear and orderly bookkeeping and record-keeping systems. The systems established in Lima should have complementary and easily replicable systems at the regional and community levels.
- Immediately establish the number and names of the communities where the business will focus its product development activities. This will allow the product development team to focus its strategic marketing plans to the specific products, problems, and opportunities in those communities.
- Develop a business plan with specific goals for Years 1, 2 and 3. Care should be given to separate general development and educational services—and their costs—from product development activities. In other words, only the specific expenses that a normal business would attribute to developing a product should be included in this business plan. All other services, activities, and extraordinary expenses related to the ReproSalud program should be assumed by ReproSalud and not included in the business component's budget.
- Explore appropriate ways to include women producers and their community organizations to promote a sense of ownership and loyalty to the business. There are several different organizational options to look at, but whichever is chosen, it

should be one where the success or failure of the business will be in direct proportion to the women's loyalty and efforts.

A Final Note

It may seem that short shrift was given to examining the potential market demand for the project's proposed products in this report, but that is because we are confident of the strong market demand for the project's products. At this point, it is more important to focus on the tremendous learning curve that has been achieved in the project's first two years, pinpoint the urgent need to overcome the obstacles encountered, and create a viable business to continue the work.

Once a business plan and actual business are in place, we propose to develop a report with product development and marketing strategies for the business.